
On This Rock: Confession, Fear, and the Unity Christ Builds

An Evensong meditation by the Rev. Canon Salmoon Bashir
The Feast of the Confession of St. Peter

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This week the Church around the world enters the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, shaped by Jesus' own prayer: that they all may be one. Since 1908, Christians have set aside these eight days, from January 18 to January 25, to pray not for uniformity, but for unity rooted in Christ. The week begins with Peter's confession and ends with Paul's conversion. Two giant figures of the Church. Very different personalities. Strong disagreements. Yet both were held together by the same Lord and the same call.

Today we remember Peter and his confession: You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

In the Gospel, Jesus asks two questions. First: Who do people say that the Son of Man is? The disciples offer safe answers. John the Baptist. Elijah. One of the prophets. Then Jesus presses deeper. Here's the thing. He is not interested in secondhand opinions. He asks the question that still unsettles us today: But who do you say that I am?

Peter answers with courage and clarity. *You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. The* long-awaited one. The anointed deliverer. The one who reveals the living God among us.

This confession matters not only because it is correct, but because it opens the way forward. From this moment on, Jesus begins to speak plainly about the cross. Suffering. Death. Resurrection. And friends, unity in Christ does not bypass the cross. It passes straight through it.

Even though Jesus knew that Peter was going to deny him, as Peter surrendered and opened himself up to Jesus, Jesus said, "Simon, son of Jonah, you are blessed." Jesus blesses Peter and gives him a new name. Petros. Rock. Not because Peter is flawless, but because he has recognized the presence of the living God standing before him. With that recognition, Peter begins his lifelong journey of becoming what he has confessed.

And yet, we know the rest of the story. This rock will crack. Fear will take hold. In the high priest's courtyard, the same Peter who proclaimed Jesus as Messiah will deny him three times: "I do not know this man at all."

Friends, that tension matters for Christian unity. Peter is not remembered only for his confession or only for his denial, but for the way Christ holds both together and still builds the Church through him. Unity does not come from pretending we have never failed. It comes from letting Christ restore us and keep us at the same table.

Peter's story speaks deeply to my own life and ironically, I have my own story of fear and denying Jesus, but not because I was uncomfortable or unsure about my faith but because I feared for my life if I openly declared my faith in Christ.

I was a college student at the time of this story. Due to certain worldwide events, there were massive strikes and protests happening in Pakistan which increased hostility towards Christians there.

One day, after our classes were canceled, I was trying to get home but couldn't find any transportation when a man offered me a ride. As we drove, we were talking about all the things happening in the country at the time. As engaging as I was during our conversation, the driver became suspicious of me, maybe because he sensed

something during our talk and all of a sudden, he asked me: "Are you a Christian?" I felt chills all over my body as I replied to him: "No, I'm not! What are you even talking about." And I immediately went back to our conversation to cover up my fear.

Before I had managed to gather my thoughts, he again asked me: "Are you really telling the truth? Are you not a Christian?" Fighting back my tears, I answered him again firmly: "No, I'm not." As we continued our conversation the only thought in my mind was how to get out of the car as soon as possible. Towards the end of our ride, he again circled back saying: "I have a doubt that you are a Christian." I could hear my own heartbeat in my ears as for the third time I answered him: "I'm not. I am not a Christian." Those words did not come from rebellion or doubt. They came from fear. From the very real sense that telling the truth might cost me my life.

And even today, when I try to make sense of this encounter, I keep coming back to the journey of Peter. What could he have been thinking, going from the bold confession of "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" to denying Jesus, saying "I do not know this man at all". The very fear took over the Rock on which Jesus promised to build His Church. Peter who days before proclaimed "you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God", the same Peter whose heart was on fire for Jesus, denied Christ over and over again when he was overcome by fear.

When I look back, I understand Peter more clearly. I understand how quickly fear can silence a confession. How the gap between faith and courage can feel impossibly wide. And yet, Peter's story does not end in denial. Neither does mine. Neither does ours.

What this really means is that unity in the Church is not built on perfect courage or flawless witness. It is built on grace. On Christ's refusal to give up on broken disciples. On the Spirit's power to turn fear into testimony.

The same Peter who denied Jesus later stood before crowds and proclaimed, "Silver and gold I have none, but what I have I give you: Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

That Peter became a blessing not because he was better than the others, but because Christ made room for him, just as he made room for Paul, and just as he makes room for us.

As we pray for Christian unity this week, we do not pray as strangers competing for the truth. We pray as wounded, forgiven people who share one confession, one Lord, one baptism. We pray knowing that Christ builds his Church not on fear, not on power, not on sameness, but on lives opened to him again and again.

That is why Peter and Paul belong together in this week. They argued. They clashed. They saw the mission differently at times. Yet neither walked away from Christ, and Christ did not walk away from either of them. Unity was not agreement on everything. Unity was shared surrender to the same Lord.

Friends, my prayer for all of us is that may we recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God even in the midst of our own courtyard moments and may that shared confession draw us closer to one another, until the world sees, not our divisions, but the grace that holds us together. Amen!